

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGER'S ROUNDTABLE WITH  
BRIGADIER GENERAL TERRY WOLFF, COMMANDING GENERAL,  
COALITION MILITARY ASSISTANCE TRAINING TEAM

MODERATOR: JACK HOLT, OSD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

TIME: 10:32 A.M. EDT

DATE: FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 2007

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MR. HOLT: The next voice you'll hear is Brigadier General Terry Wolff.

GEN. WOLFF: Hello, everybody. How are you? This is Terry Wolff on the  
line.

MR. HOLT: Good morning. Good morning, sir.

GEN. WOLFF: Hey!

MR. HOLT: I'm Jack Holt with OSDPA, and I'd like to welcome you, sir, to this morning's blogger's roundtable. And those of you on the line here, gentlemen, I'd like to ask you that when you ask your question to identify yourself and your organization. And with that, we will get started.

Good morning, General. Do you have an opening statement?

GEN. WOLFF: Well, I'd just like to make a very, very brief one. It won't take me but a second. I would merely state that as you're hearing from other mediums, there's a lot going on in Iraq and particularly in Baghdad, a lot going on particularly in Baghdad as well regarding efforts to work with the Iraqis to deal with the sectarian violence and militias as well as security in the city.

I don't do much of that. I'm involved with more of the training of the Iraqi security forces as well as helping them work the stand up of their logistical enterprises both at, really, what we would call above the tactical level or the operational level and at the strategic level. I kind of looked downward into the Iraqi military formations, but then I helped them more from an institutional, training, logistical perspective.

So I kind of open with that. If there's a question that you ask that's out of my lane, I'll kind of tell you that, and we can certainly get you the answer by lateraling into some other sources. How's that for a start?

MR. HOLT: Sounds good. Appreciate it.

GEN. WOLFF: It works for us, sir.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew.

Q Yeah, General, Andrew Lubin from ON Point. When I was with some Marine MiTTs units in Fallujah and Habbaniya, it struck me that there's a lack of language skills and a reliance on the "terps." And some of the "terps" are really good and some aren't. How does one train ITs, IAs, or the ISAs, the ISFs when you have such language barriers? And are there any efforts back in the states to boost the Arabic language capability of our men?

GEN. WOLFF: That's a really good question. The challenge you have using interpreters is it's both simple and complex. The simple part is that they are -- they do have different language -- English language abilities, as you have clearly identified, and so you have to kind of work -- you kind of work with them and you determine who can best accomplish the tasks that you have at hand. We tend to have a fair number of interpreters. Occasionally in some areas, there'll be shortages, as they are recruited and moved around to different locations.

The other challenge you have is that there tends to be a -- you know, there tends to be a point where coalition folks get comfortable with particular interpreters. And so

from, you know, an operational perspective -- an operational security perspective, you like to kind of rotate your interpreters around just to keep things, you know, kind of balanced and -- as well as so that you understand that there isn't an overreliance on a particular individual who might not be giving you the complete story.

The second part of your question is -- you know, gets to how well are we training soldiers to do -- in Arabic language skills. We're doing one heck of a lot better than we did in 2003. And when I came over here the first time, I mean, I basically got handed -- I didn't get handed an Arabic language guidebook. Well, what's happened now? I mean, the difference is most of these units have a fair bit of warning that they're coming over here, and they start, you know, immersing their leaders and soldiers into small Arabic language instruction.

Now let me give an example. I came out of Fort Carson, Colorado, and we had a series of language labs there that we used and were able to start running soldiers through language -- some elementary language training.

You're not going to be proficient. You just want to be able to, you know, to convey greetings and you want to be able to understand elementary road signs and certainly numbers and things of that nature. We're talking about nothing that approaches immersion here; that's for sure.

Q Well, no, but if -- I appreciate that, sir. But in the meantime, if all they can do is count one through 10 and -- or whatever, it seems to me the more that they -- even if they can't hold a good conversation, the more they know, the better it is, because half of this is training and half of this is confidence -- building confidence. Isn't it?

GEN. WOLFF: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

Q Okay.

GEN. WOLFF: Absolutely, and there's no disagreement there.

The other thing soldiers will get involved in, too, is some of the distance learning courses that are available.

Q Okay.

GEN. WOLFF: I mean, the Army, as an example, has made the Rosetta Stone course available.

The other thing that kind of occurs is, as the advisory teams are now coming, either -- the Marine advisory teams and the Army advisory teams are both getting language training as they start to spin up before they come.

So let me give you an example. The Army teams are all going through Fort Riley, Kansas. They'll be there for 60 days of training. All that incorporates language training. They'll have some additional language training in Kuwait before they come north. When they arrive up in country here, they'll have about an additional two weeks of training. They have some additional language lab opportunities made available.

So again, it's about familiarity. It's -- we're not talking fluency here.

Q No, I appreciate -- yeah, I know it's a tough language to learn. I mean, I have to write things on my hands when I stand in front somebody -- "Hello/How are you" type of things. (Chuckling.) It's not easy when you're over 18.

GEN. WOLFF: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q Appreciate it. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: David?

Q General, thanks for taking the time. So you have oversight of Iraqi logistics training, then. Right?

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, I sure do. I sure do.

Q So can you speak to any progress on that front in the past, say, six months? And if there has been progress, can you give me an example of it?

GEN. WOLFF: Sure. I certainly can. Let me kind of stop at the top -- start at the top end. At the top end of the Iraqi log structure, we've been trying to get them to stand up a support command. I mean, that organization has the responsibility to become the log execution agency for the Iraqis. And we've been working with them to put the organization together on paper. We now have a commander identified, a deputy commander identified. And we have some of the elementary functions of it now represented, and they've begun to man it. We have it in a location. So it -- and it's now begun to be stood up in kind of an interim fashion, so that we can work with it and help coach and mentor it to do, you know, what I would call key logistical tracking functions. So there's the beginning of the support command there.

Secondly, there is a national depot up at a place called Taji, north of Baghdad. And Taji has -- it has -- it's a two-part depot. One part is -- handles supply functions and then the other handles maintenance.

The supply depot is up and running. It has basically been up and operating for a good while. It has the responsibility for distributing Iraqi logistical supplies.

And as you know, both through the coalition and Iraqi help, they have equipped the initial 10 divisions with equipment. All that equipment is passed through Taji depot,

on the supply side. And we've got a commander of it, about 400 soldiers up there that are working side by side with their coalition counterparts, who are, again, in the training and coaching mode.

We are also helping them stand up a maintenance depot. We are in the elementary phases of that. We have a facility; we have some elementary maintenance functions starting. But that's still at the very early stages, and that will hit what we would call an initial operating capability sometime during the summer here.

Q Oh, I'm sorry, General -- identify myself. I'm David Axe with Aviation Week.

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah. Hey, David.

Q Can I follow up real briefly on that?

GEN. WOLFF: Sure.

Q What about -- so I understand that the depot is standing up. But what about the -- basically the truck convoys that would get those supplies out to units? Are those operating at, you know, any kind of capacity?

GEN. WOLFF: The Iraqis have 10 divisions, and nine of those divisions have a motor transport regiment. That transport regiment has got about 300 trucks in it. And it has the mission to go up to Taji Depot, pick up things, and distribute it to the divisions, or to go to a regional support unit. And there are five of those spread throughout the country. Each one of them normally support two divisions, and they will send those trucks to those regional support units to pick up supplies that had been throughputted to them.

We are still contracting for a certain amount of transportation support at the higher echelon -- in other words, things that would come in through the port. We are still moving a lot of that via coalition means, in terms of contracted transportation. The Iraqis are starting to assume that load, and they've started picking up some of that responsibility in the very early stages.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: And Mark.

Q Yes. General Wolff, it's Mark Finkelstein from Newsbusters.

GEN. WOLFF: Hi, Mark.

Q Given your focus on the Iraqi forces, and also your view of things from above a tactical level, I wonder if I could invite you to comment on the role that Iraqi

forces are playing in our new MNF strategy. A couple specifics: There had been some skepticism expressed in American media as to the willingness of the peshmerga to actually come down and participate. And just in general, I wonder if I could invite you to describe the role that Iraqi forces have been playing and what sort of success you've been seeing.

GEN. WOLFF: Sure. I'm happy to do that. Just a little bit about how the Iraqis have integrated into the fight. I mean, there are 10 Iraqi divisions out there. They are all in battle space. They are all fighting on a day-to-day basis.

You step that you see us that has been taken most recently, which started really last summer in and around Baghdad, had to do with trying to get the Iraqis more integrated into the maneuver and combat formations associated with operations in Baghdad. And what you have seen in the last two months is a -- you know, a reenergized effort in that realm.

And so what you're beginning to see now in Baghdad is joint security stations which have Iraqi police, Iraqi military and coalition soldiers all living and working together out in the neighborhoods. That isn't necessarily brand new, it's been going on for a while, but it has received some additional emphasis in the last two months. That is not different than what was happening up in Mosul already. It is also beginning to happen out in Al Anbar as well.

And that is certainly a good-news story. So that is kind of a slight shift that you're beginning -- it's beginning to bear some fruition based on what we're kind of seeing and hearing about in the streets of Baghdad and other places.

Your comment about the role of Iraqis and the movement of forces from the north is particularly interesting. As you probably know, a number of Iraqi units were designated to move to Baghdad during the fall. Some of them did move down here successfully. Some of them moved down here with a lot fewer soldiers than they were authorized or assigned. And then some of them didn't make the move because they virtually couldn't pull it together. You know, one of those was down in the south, down in Basra. One of those was up in the north.

We went to school on that and gathered some lessons learned from, you know, what went right and what went wrong. And as we did that, we kind of -- and we did this analysis in two different realms. In one case the MNC-I, the Corps went out with the ground force command, IGFC, and took a look at those units. They went out and interviewed the key leaders and kind of did a good, thorough, after-action review. Simultaneously I sat down with my boss and then several of the Iraqi senior leaders and we kind of did the same analysis -- what went right, what went wrong, and what would you fix to make it better next time.

Well, some of those lessons learned were applied, and the way we described this was deployability; how do you train the Iraqi army to execute a deployability program?

And we decided it would need to be a multifaceted program. And "we" is the Iraqis and us. And the decision was, hey, let's make sure that we tell the units well in advance that they're coming down here. The Iraqis said, hey, let's add an incentive so that the units that are designated to come down here will receive incentive pay.

Thirdly, we thought that it would be a good idea if we could give them some focused training before they were employed into, you know, Baghdad security operations. So we were able to work and expand our training concept, enroll them through a place called Besmaya Range Complex. And so they would do at least two weeks of training there, and again, the number of days would vary based on the training assessment by the unit commanders and their advisory teams.

And then lastly, they would be employed into Baghdad for a period of time, somewhere in the neighborhood of 90 days, but it could be extended. And they would receive that stipend or that bonus at the time they were deployed. And then they would go back to where they came from and do a bit of, you know, stand-down and then, you know, get soldiers back out on leave and things of that sort.

What we have found is that that deployability program is paying some dividends. And so units are coming down, their strengths have increased with successive units coming down from December up through February. We've been able to get about half the units run through Besmaya training, which has increased their combat capability. And then all those units have been employed in Baghdad, and they're all serving there today.

And so if you ask your -- if I ask my Iraqi brothers about this, they would tell you, hey, listen, our Iraqi units have to be able to come from the north or the south, and they have to be able to deploy and they have to be able to fight. And that's just an essential and critical element of what makes soldiering important and also what the Iraqi army, in this case, has to be able to do.

Q Thank you very much, General.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, Mark.

Bill Roggio.

Q General, Bill Roggio with billroggio.com. A quick question -- or actually a couple of questions here. The indications were that we're now training about 7,500 Iraqis per month. Does this mean that there's -- 7,500 are being graduated per month? And I got a couple of follow-up questions with that.

GEN. WOLFF: Okay.

Yeah, it's -- what we started back in the fall was an effort to go back and try to make sure that in those 10 divisions, that they were full; in other words, that you were

replacing soldiers who had either become wounded or killed or had gone AWOL. I mean, like in every army, there are some folks that aren't showing up for work.

And so I sat down with our Iraqi friends, and we put together a training concept which was designed to recruit some soldiers from the divisional areas and then to send them to six different regional training centers, which were expanded to accommodate the extra training requirement. The name of the initiative was called the 30,000 or the 30K Initiative. To date, we've trained, with the class that's graduating about now with about the 7,000 plus that you mentioned, it'll take us over about 21,000. This is the third cycle, so you can do the -- you know, the (mere division ?), and you say, hey, that's about 7,000 per cycle. And that's true, we had gotten to the point where we thought we could get about 8,600 into our training facilities. Unfortunately, we had some training capacity issues, and, you know, the number of 7,000 is probably going to be about the number we work through.

So are they all graduating from training? No. We lose a few during the way. Each of the training centers, you know, will have in the neighborhood of, you know, from 20 to 50 that don't make it through the course. And so that -- you know, that attrition isn't too bad. Generally, when you're starting with 750 or even more per regional training center, you're going to have some attrition. I mean, it's a volunteer army here. So those soldiers -- we're cranking out about 7,000 now about every eight weeks, is the best way to think of it. It isn't quite per month.

Okay, I know you had a follow-on question.

Q Okay, so these are --

MR. HOLT: Okay, Bill, are you with us?

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, we lost Bill.

Q Okay, is that better? Can you hear me now?

MR. HOLT: Yes.

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, much better.

Q Sorry about that, my headset gave out.

So then what about the -- there was a discussion of three additional divisions -- Iraqi army divisions being formed. What's being done on that?

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, exactly. That is exactly correct, and I would sharpen the language a little bit. And here's what I would say.



They are basically forming about two division equivalents. And there are a total of two division headquarters, and then they will have all their separate companies as part of that. One will go into East Baghdad; another one will go up north, probably up at Kirkuk.

There will also be about six maneuver brigades that will be added to the formations that already exist. And then there will be, you know, a number of, you know, roughly three battalions for each of those brigades; that takes you to 18. And then there are several Iraqi brigades that do not have -- they're only two-battalion brigades, and they want to add a third battalion to each of those. And so we kind of have an order of list where we know where the Iraqis and we are going to build those first.

The Iraqis own this thing. It's called the prime minister's initiative. He's the guy who said, I want to expand this army. And so this six brigades that I've mentioned aren't going under those two parent division headquarters. Those six brigades will be spread throughout the country where the brigades are needed, based on the enemy situation on the ground.

Q Oh, can I just real quick -- you said you --

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah.

Q I missed the last part of that where you said there were individual battalions that were being added? I didn't get that.

GEN. WOLFF: Sure. Yeah, let me give you an example. There are several divisions which have brigades that only have two battalions in the brigade. And their goal is, expand it to three battalions per brigade.

Q Got it, okay. Thank you very much, General. It was very informative.

GEN. WOLFF: Sure, my pleasure.

MR. HOLT: And Victoria, were you able to join us?

Q Excuse me, sorry. General, this is Victoria Coates with Redstate.com. I'm a little bit choked up, because we've got a giant ice storm going on here today. And actually, most of the guys covered my specific questions.

But one thing that I've been wondering about under more general terms is if we could define recent success in Iraq as a maturing policy rather than this sort of vaunted new direction. And if so, I was wondering if you could speak a little bit to the primary goals that you're setting for the next six months that we might not be expecting in the States, things that will sort of continue this development.

GEN. WOLFF: Sure. I mean, my personal opinion is this is more evolutionary, versus revolutionary, in terms of modification of the strategy. That's how we describe it. We're not -- it's not like people have walked in -- everyone's walked in anew or woken up in the morning and said, you know, if we just do this, everything will be -- everything will work its way out.

And you've heard General Petraeus and others describe this in very guarded comments, and that's exactly the way it should be. I mean, there are good days and there are bad days here, and we need to recognize that.

At the same time, the partnership that we've seen with the security forces, coalition and Iraqi, working together, is certainly a step in the right direction. Again, you know, the theory of counterinsurgency, getting in amongst the population, working for popular support, trying to deal with the intimidation of the bad guys is all critical to, you know, making progress and getting the people in Baghdad and other places comfortable with the threat and -- comfortable with what we're trying to accomplish.

The second part of your question about where we're going in the future is, you know, are we going to roll out anything new? And my answer would be -- I'm the wrong guy to ask that question, but not to my knowledge. It's more about maturing the ongoing efforts.

Q Thank you very much.

Q General, this is Bill Roggio. I was wondering if I could ask one follow-up question again.

GEN. WOLFF: Sure.

Q Okay. Are the supposedly two additional -- you know, the brigades, battalions, divisions that are being formed up -- are we doing this in conjunction with rounding out the army units or are we going to do the roundout process then do the formation? Are they happening in parallel?

GEN. WOLFF: No, it's happening simultaneously.

Q Okay.

GEN. WOLFF: In fact -- yeah, we're using -- in addition to those six regional training centers I mentioned, the Iraqis also have three training battalions, and they are doing both of these simultaneously.

Q Okay.

GEN. WOLFF: And I know it sounds a little confusing, but they've got the capability to do that. And so we're using -- we're growing these new units at their

training battalions, and we're filling the original 10 divisions based on the 30K Initiative at the regional training centers.

Q Got it. Thank you very much.

GEN. WOLFF: Sure.

Q General, Andrew Lubin. A quick follow-up.

GEN. WOLFF: Yes.

Q Could you describe how you see the MiTTs program evolving? I've seen a lot -- I've spent some time with the nine-man teams in some of the different OPs, and then recently I was with Colonel Kershaw from 10th Mountain in 215; he designated that as his MiTTs battalion, I guess. I guess the Marines converted over -- converted their artillery into (five cabinets ?). Are you looking more to (convert ?) the units over or keeping it with the smaller teams?

GEN. WOLFF: Yeah, there is an effort to expand the teams. And you heard a lot of discussion about that several months ago, and that remains the plan as I understand it. Again, there's a recognition that, you know, a nine-man team or 11-man team is a bit small. And as you continue -- as this force continues to mature and you begin to look at where do MiTTs and what should MiTTs provide in terms of advisory skills, you know, you can recognize even from our dialogue that there's going to be a need to help them more with logistics and personal administration besides just the combat tasks that are occurring out there.

Q Okay.

GEN. WOLFF: So there's kind of an ongoing dialogue about, you know, the expansion of the MiTTs. And in certain places like -- as you've mentioned, the Marines have already expanded their teams out west, from what I know, of the two MiTT teams with the 1st Iraqi Army Division and the 7th Iraqi Army Division.

MR. HOLT: Okay. We're about ought of time here.

Does anybody have any other questions, final questions?

Q I just have one quick one. Are the super MiTT teams now being deployed?  
Are we now --

GEN. WOLFF: Yes.

Q -- in the process of doing that? Okay, great.

GEN. WOLFF: In some cases, they are. In other words, the new teams that are coming out of the states are larger.

Q Okay.

GEN. WOLFF: And there's a mixture of teams here. There are some that are externally developed. In other words, they are built outside of Iraq, and they are run through, as I said, about 60 days of training before they get here. And then there are some teams that are internally sourced from within current forces on the ground.

There's a recognition here that the MiTT teams should grow to deal with the Iraqi-required training tasks. So I would tell you that it's a little bit of a mixture of both, and the MNC-I commander will kind of determine with his division commanders when, where and how they will transition the teams at the right time based on the fight that they've got going on.

Q Great. Thank you.

GEN. WOLFF: Sure.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you, General Wolff, for joining us this morning, this afternoon for you. I appreciate your time, and hopefully, we can do this again.

GEN. WOLFF: Oh, I appreciate it, and once again, thanks for all you're doing to get -- you and the folks out there -- to get the word out. And we think there's certainly a story to tell, and I know you'll help us deliver that. And once again, I kind of salute all these great Americans that are out there, you know, supporting and fighting this struggle out here. I saw a bunch of them today at a different location I was out visiting, and they're just doing a magnificent job. And you look in their eyes, and they are -- they're trying to do the best they can every single day, which is all we can ask of them. And it just makes your heart proud, I'll tell you that much.

So I thank you very much for what you're doing to tell that story for us.

MR. HOLT: Thank you for what you do, General.

Q Thank you, General.

GEN. WOLFF: Take care.

Q General, thanks for the time.

GEN. WOLFF: Mm-hmm. You take care.

Q Thank you, sir.

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